FREEDOM

July 2, 2004

Watch

27th Eng. Bn. digs in at FOS Carlson
Cover Story Page 6

Field landing strip multiplies combat capabilities
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Wide Load!

Logistics technicians unload an L-1011 on the Bagram Air Base flight line June 16. This L-1011, which brought in more than 80,000 pounds of mail, was the first commercial wide-body aircraft to land on the airfield since U.S. operations began in 2001.

Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates

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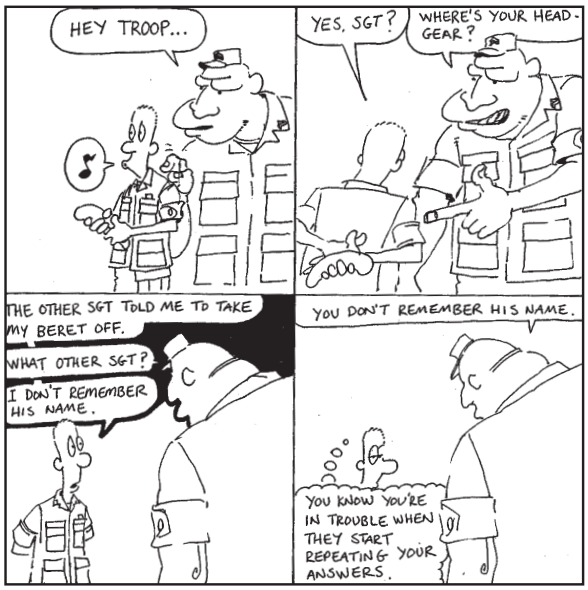
Cover photo by Pfc. Chris Stump

A Soldier with the 27th Eng. Bn. fires his M240B Machine Gun during a live-fire exercise at Forward Operating Site Carlson June 16. The battalion began setting up operations there around the end of April, and can now accomodate a battalion-sized element.

See complete story on Page 6



By Mark Baker

Pvt. Murphy's Law

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27th Eng. Bn. builds field landing strip

Story and photos by
Pfc. Chris Stump
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING SITE CARLSON, Afghanistan — Just an hour and a half after their equipment hit the ground, the engineers went to work. Forty-three hours later, small aircraft were arriving on the field landing strip.

Merely weeks later, it was suitable enough for a C-130 aircraft to land.

The Soldiers who made the FLS operational in that small amount of time are from the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne), home-based at Fort Bragg, N.C. They are currently operating out of Forward Operating Site Carlson, which sits adjacent to the landing strip, 35 kilometers from the Pakistan border.

Their first mission here was to construct the 5,700-foot FLS in as little time as possible to support operations in the southeastern region of Afghanistan, said 1st Lt. Kurt Zortman, FLS construction officer-in-charge. Due to the altitude here, the runway had to be considerably longer than it would at sea level, otherwise a C-130 wouldn't be able to execute a safe takeoff.

"We were tasked to construct a C-130-capable airstrip, complete with taxiways and refueling capabilities," he said.

Until now, there wasn't the capability to land an aircraft as large as a C-130 in the area, he said, as the runway only had the capacity to accommodate aircraft that required short take offs and landings.

The construction of the runway called for a company-sized element, but two light equipment platoons took on the task and accomplished the mission successfully.

Just after the Soldiers' air-assault in, Air Force C-17's dropped the engineers' heavy equipment via parachutes. Within 24 hours of the engineers being on the ground, and just over an hour after the drop, they started construction of the runway, said Zortman.

Soldiers of the 27th Eng. Bn. excavate dirt to build the expanding taxiways on FOS Carlson's flightline.

The task of completing the more-than-one-mile-long runway was not an easy one, though, said Zortman. The extreme terrain and weather of the region challenged the engineers and their equipment.

They began by removing the top layer of earth where the runway would soon stand. But underneath, the Soldiers found huge rocks that often had to be moved by hand and shovel. The conditions prevented them from maneuvering the boulders out of the way with their machines, said Staff Sgt. Terry Dammann, construction foreman for the light equipment platoons charged with building the strip. Moving rocks by hand was tough work for men running 24-hour construction operations, and living in nothing more than foxholes with parachutes for cover.

Sgt. Yubran Sevilla, 27th Eng. Bn., guides a local national worker with hand signals to dump a load of soil on the expanding taxiway at FOS Carlson June 16.

After clearing the top soil, work began on grating and leveling out the runway, another difficult task due to the environment, said Dammann.

While the engineers were planning their mission back at Fort Bragg and their final planning at Bagram Air Base, they planned to have access to water for the leveling and hardening process on the runway, he said. But when they arrived, they found no water sources and were forced to dig a well to have enough water to construct the strip properly.

"Water is essential to the construction of an FLS," said Zortman. "Without it, the soil is like powder and an aircraft wouldn't be able to use the strip."

The engineers dumped water and clay-like soil from areas just off the landing strip on the runway daily to level it and pack it down, said Damman.

The lack of water and the huge rocks weren't the only issues though – running night operations took some getting used to, said Spc. Daniel Jaques, Company A, 27th Eng. Bn., heavy equipment operator.

Due to security, the engineers could not use floodlights during their night operations and had to run their machinery seeing only with night vision goggles, he said.

"Running this machinery with NVGs was different at first, but not too much of a challenge," said Jaques. "It wasn't too bad when the moon was out, but after a while, you did it mostly by feel."

Despite the few problems the battalion overcame with construction, their mission was a success, said Zortman.

The unit took what it learned in years of training and experience before deploying here and accomplished their mission to standard, he said. They took a barren piece of land and turned it into an airstrip that increases combat power in the region, as well as enables re-supply for the troops here and security for the region.

"I got to put what I was trained to do into operation," said Dammann. "This was an actual airborne operation. This was an actual engineer mission."

A C-130 lands at FOS Carlson June 16. The engineers of the 27th Eng. Bn. arrived in late April and constructed the airstrip and a base camp within 35 kilometers of the Pakistan border.

Thunderbolts track enemy with LITENING pod

Story and photo by
Air Force Master Sgt. Andrew Gates
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — When lightning strikes, it impacts everything around it.

The same could be said of an A-10 strike, especially when complemented by the advanced capabilities provided by the LITENING pod.

But the Laser Infrared Targeting and Navigating pod provides A-10 pilots with much more than improved attack capabilities, said Air Force Capt. Matt McGarry, 355th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron weapons officer. With the pod, a pilot providing close air support for ground troops has more options to seek out enemies and protect friendly forces.

"The LITENING pod adds great capabilities to an already outstanding close air support weapons platform," he said.

The externally mounted pod enables fighter pilots to detect and identify ground targets and accurately deliver conventional and precision-guided munitions. It gives the pilot access to six tools – a charged coupled device camera, similar to a traditional video camera, able to film in low light conditions; a forward-looking infrared camera, or FLIR, using the infrared spectrum to find and track targets, day or night; a laser designator to guide precision bombs; an infrared marker shooting a pulsing infrared beam, visible to those wearing night vision goggles, to identify ground targets; a laser rangefinder integrated with the A-10's Global Positioning System, enabling pilots to determine the distance to ground targets; and a laser spot tracker allowing pilots to work in concert. One pilot can point out a target with a laser and the other pilot can use his pod to search for and track the target.

Air Force Capt. Kieth Wolack, 355th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, performs preflight checks on the LITENING targeting and navigation pod before launching his A-10.

The biggest plus to ground troops is the laser designator, said Air Force Capt. Chris Taylor, 355th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron A-10 pilot. This adds a capability to the A-10 that the system didn't have before – the ability to employ precision-guided bombs. "When we are flying close air support missions, the troops on the ground want precision munitions – bringing laser guided munitions to the fight is a great bonus for the A-10."

This pod is exceptionally useful in many ways, especially at night, said McGarry. "LITENING is another sensor to help us find targets, friendly forces and other points of interest – for example, a potential ambush site in front of a convoy. The pod gives us information we may not be able to see with the naked eye, binoculars or night vision goggles."

The pod also helps A-10 pilots increase the accuracy of the conventional munitions they drop. "The laser range finder gives us very accurate target elevations, which increases our accuracy," said McGarry.

Although increasing the accuracy is important with conventional munitions, knowing exactly what is targeted can mean the difference between life and death, especially for friendly forces on the ground. "With my eyes, I can see a vehicle," said

See ***Pod,*** *Page 10*

Enduring Voices

What is the one thing you wish you had done before deploying?

2nd Lt. Chad Hofus
2nd Bn., 135th Inf. Rgt.
Minnesota National Guard
"I wish I would have had more time to learn about Afghanistan."

Korean Lt. Col. Lee, Sang-Dae
CJTF-76 Liaison Officer
"*I wish I could have sung in the church choir one more time."*

Jesse Glenn
KBR food service
"I wanted to go fishing one more time."

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Bobby Kilmer
VAQ-34
"I should have gone home to see my family."

CMA provides aid to ailing animal population

Story by
Pfc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

Sgt. Frank Magni

Maj. Trudy Salerno (left), 2nd Lt. Nikolai Moore (center) and Maj. David Ferris, CMA team members, administer a vaccine to a cow outside the city of Ruye Sang June 14.

ROMERO DISTRICT, Afghanistan — In the predominately agrarian culture of Afghanistan, livestock remains one of the most important aspects of survival for the local population, both economically and nutritionally.

When American and New Zealand troops visited the Romero district, they not only offered medical care to the people, but they also cared for their animals.

Ruye Sang, Ghandakia and Romero villages were chosen for a recent Cooperative Medical Assistance mission to the area not only because of the number of families in each village, but also because of the need for veterinary care for the many animals, said Maj. Trudy Salerno, Task Force Victory surgeon cell veterinarian.

The veterinary care was important in the area because of a blackleg outbreak last year that wiped out most of the herds in the area, she said

"Not too long ago there was an outbreak of blackleg (a disease caused by bacteria) in the herds in this area," she said. "So we came here to provide medical assistance and the blackleg vaccine to the livestock that are left."

Pfc. Cheryl Ransford

A Soldier gives dewormer to a mule during the CMA in Ghandakia village June 15.

Even after the CMAs are complete, one aspect Salerno emphasized to all the villagers was that the health of their animals is very important.

Many of the herdsmen say they can't afford to vaccinate their herds, so they continue to lose livestock to diseases that could have been prevented by a simple vaccination, she said.

"Livestock is the center of the Afghan economy," said Salerno.

One piece of advice Salerno offered to the herdsmen was liquidating a small portion of the herd to vaccinate the rest.

"If they vaccinate their livestock and the herd grows bigger and healthier, the value of the herd is improved by about 20 percent," she said.

With livestock being a large part of the economy, the health of the animals is very important, she said.

Salerno, who previously worked with the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture in Kabul, said that prior to the decades of civil war there were an estimated 33 million animals throughout Afghanistan. Since the war has ended the number of animals has dwindled 40 percent to 19.8 million.

There are several reasons for the decrease in the number of animals, she said. One of the most important is the lack of vaccines for the animals.

"Many years ago Afghanistan made its own vaccinations in Kabul," said Salerno. "But when the Soviets took power, they destroyed much of what the people used to care for their families and make their money.

"During the destruction of the country, the Soviets also shut down the factories that made the vaccinations. Some of those vaccinations were for the livestock in order to keep them healthy," she said.

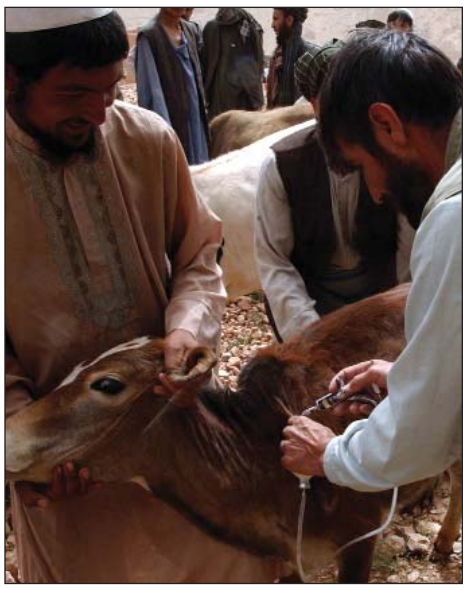
When the villagers bring their animals to the CMAs, the animals receive basic care.

Salerno said that by treating the animals in Afghanistan, she has realized the importance of many things she previously took for granted.

"Being here has helped me to understand that treating the animals is the only way some people have food, or are able to get around."

The livestock in Afghanistan are the livelihood of the people, she said. Without the animals, the people would never have been able to survive what they have been through to get to where they are today.

Through opportunities like the CMAs, Salerno hopes that more can be done so the Afghan people can reach the level of prosperity with their livestock that they once had.



Pfc. Cheryl Ransford

Ashgar (right), French NGO Solidares veterinarian, injects a cow with the blackleg vaccination during the Ghandakia village CMA June 15.

27th Eng. Bn. establishes FOS Carlson

Story and photos by
Pfc. Chris Stump
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING SITE CARLSON, Afghanistan — Their tired eyes and dusty faces tell the story of the dedication they have poured into this remote, desolate place to build an airstrip and base camp where nothing but rocks and sand existed two months ago.

The engineers are from the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C., and were sent to Paktika Province in late April to construct a field landing strip and a 500-man base camp to assist in operations in the southeastern region of Afghanistan. Their base camp sits only 35 kilometers from the Pakistan border.

The 27th Eng. Bn. is one of the Army's two airborne-capable engineer units that stand ready to rapidly deploy to areas such as Afghanistan to construct field landing strips and base camps, said Lt. Col. Michael P. Crall, 27th Eng. Bn. commander.

"We got the word three weeks before we deployed," he said of the deployment orders.

Their rapid deployment took them first to Bagram Air Base, where they completed planning of their mission, which would take the engineers to a place in the country not many Coalition forces had been.

They planned a rotary-wing assault to secure the area where the field landing strip would be constructed, and at the same time, executed a ground assault convoy from Bagram to bring in the rest of their combat power and all their wheeled vehicles.

Staff Sgt. Erick Alcantara, Co. B, 27th Eng. Bn., test fires his weapon from one of FOS Carlson's guard towers just after "stand to."

The air assault was successful and the engineers of the 27th Eng. Bn. met no resistance in securing the areas where a landing strip and 500-man base camp now stand, he said.

The ground assault convoy was also successful, he said, having little enemy contact and arriving on schedule with all its troops and equipment.

Twenty-four hours after assaulting in and securing their objective, the engineers received their heavy equipment drop by parachute, said Crall. This drop included all the heavy machinery they needed – including graders, loaders and an earthmover – to start construction of their main priority, the field landing strip.

The equipment dropped in by Air Force C-17's comprised the largest heavy equipment drop since World War II, and also at the highest altitude, said Crall of the history-making operation, something his unit is no stranger to.

The "Tigers" of the 27th Eng. Bn. have participated in conflicts from World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, as well as Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

"Absolutely a successful heavy drop – we were able to de-rig all the engineer equipment in about an hour and then had blades in the ground," said Crall.

"Forty-three hours later we had a short take-off and landing capable airstrip and landed our first aircraft," he added.

Just weeks later, it was C-130-capable. During the first month the 27th Eng. Bn. was on the ground, they pulled 24-hour operations to ensure the flightline would be completed on schedule – all while living in fighting positions with parachutes from the equipment drop for cover, said Crall.

The troops are living much better now in the base camp they built once the FLS was complete. They've built a camp capable of supporting 500 personnel, with tents and showers, said Capt. Ronald D. Williams, Jr., Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander.

"Every day it amazes me when I go out and look at where we have been – nothing existed here – to where we are now – a C-130-capable airstrip and its multiple taxiways and refueling points, with views toward improvements," said Crall.

Assaulting in to remote locations and constructing base camps and runways are the primary missions the 27th Eng. Bn. trains for, said Crall.

"All our equipment is airborne capable, as is every one of our Soldiers. We can quickly deploy anywhere to accomplish a mission like this," said Crall.

"They are very proud of what they have done," said Williams of his Soldiers. "They are building it themselves and can see what they have accomplished."

And they should be proud, said Crall.

"They operate above their pay grade, doing jobs they haven't been formally trained to do," he said.

Through all of their hard work, not only can they see what they have done, they can take pride in the fact they've taken a desolate, isolated piece of land and turned it into a

*See **Engineers,** Page 10*

Pfc. Misael Palaz, HHC, 27th Eng. Bn., replaces a part on a bulldozer at FOS Carlson.

A 27th Eng. Bn. Soldier checks in with other guards on his radio during "stand to" at FOS Carslon.

Kiwis provide stability in remote region

Story and photos by
Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

ROMERO DISTRICT, Afghanistan — Nestled in the northern province of Bamian, U.S. forces are a rare sight. But that doesn't mean reconstruction isn't taking place.

Members of the New Zealand armed forces have taken on the task with great success, despite all the challenges posed by the area.

Located at least seven hours (by truck) from the Bamian Provincial Reconstruction Team site, Forward Operating Base Romero is one of two forward sites the Kiwis operate from in the Bamian province.

Facilitating reconstruction and maintaining a Coalition presence in the area is the primary mission of the Kiwis, but many of the lessons they learned from the PRT site don't apply to Romero because of a simple difference in culture.

"Unlike our counterparts in Bamian, we are dealing with the Tajik tribe," said New Zealand Navy Lt. Cam Gordon, FOB Romero second in charge. "The Hazaras are the predominate group in the south."

Gordon said the difference in tribes forces his troops to alter their approach to the people. "They have different mannerisms and temperaments. They have different cultural sensitivities," he said.

While adjusting their approach, the theme remains the same as everywhere else in the Coalition – providing a secure environment for reconstruction to take place.

New Zealand Army Pvt. Dan Gregory, Bamian PRT, guards the perimeter of Ghandakia village during a CMA June 16.

The Kiwis provide security with presence patrols over some very unpredictable roads. With a combination run-off from mountain snow and flooding from nearby streams, a route the teams take one day might not be available the next.

"Once you think you have a handle on the road conditions, another problem will spark up somewhere else," said New Zealand Army Lt. Matt Ottaway, FOB Romero second in charge. "The roads and bridges are very unpredictable."

Aware that the roads are a constant challenge, the Kiwis at the FOB maintain a supply of essential items on the base – staying prepared for potential isolation from the PRT due to road washouts.

Right now the forces at Romero are focused on the same issues the rest of the Coalition is tuned in to. Voter registration, school building and providing medical care, as well as stabilizing the region so that other non-governmental organizations can come to assist in reconstruction, are just some of the issues the small group deals with.

New Zealand Army Maj. Tausia Tarsau, FOB Romero commander, said he has seen progress in the short time he has commanded in the area.

Tarsau said there is tremendous potential for the growth of the local government and infrastructure. "In the four months I've been here I've seen real progress."

He said the progress he has seen comes from the local population's eagerness to improve their country.

"After so many years of war they have been waiting a long time for things to improve," said Tarsau. "One of our biggest challenges is just convincing them that their suffering is over and our Coalition is here to provide a secure environment where they are safe from persecution, harassment and wrongful punishment.

"In a sense they have been convinced that we are here to help," he said. "I feel we have moved to a stage where I'm comfortable with our progress and feel we have been successful."

Success for the Kiwis in Romero comes as no surprise to Tarsau. He said the members of his military were prepared for the mission in Afghanistan because of the many rotations the New Zealand military has made in East Timor.

New Zealand Army Lance Cpl. Scott Race, Bamian PRT, stands guard outside FOB Romero June 16.

"The mission here is along the same lines as East Timor in terms of helping to rebuild the government," he said.

With two rotations through East Timor under his belt, New Zealand Cpl. Ray Davis, FOB Romero team leader, said he has used skills he gained in East Timor, but found Afghanistan to be more challenging because of the conditions.

Tarsau said even with all the challenges, "When you measure that against the satisfaction of providing a peaceful environment, you find this mission to be incredibly rewarding."

Ottaway said not only is the mission in Romero rewarding for him, but being a part of the Coalition has been the highlight of his time in Afghanistan.

"The Coalition members I've worked with here have been brilliant," he said. "It is nice to come and fit in with such a large organization."

Although small FOBs like Romero are common to the mission of Combined Joint Task Force-76, the Kiwis in Romero are adapting like the rest of the Coalition – creating another area where Afghanistan can move toward its ultimate goal of becoming autonomous.

CMA focuses on female medical treatment

Story and photos by
Pfc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

ROMERO DISTRICT, Afghanistan — American and New Zealand troops joined forces to provide a Cooperative Medical Assistance visit here June 14-19. Missions like these, which are geared toward assisting locals with much needed medical care, are conducted regularly throughout the country. What made this CMA special was the patients – an inordinate number of women.

But one of the hardest parts of any CMA is getting the women to the clinic, said Capt. Cristal Horsch, Task Force 168 physicians assistant.

Prior to the troops arriving in the villages for a CMA mission, a lot of work has gone into getting the approval of the village elders to allow the Coalition forces to come to the village and provide medical care to the villagers, said Maj. David Ferris, Task Force Victory surgeon cell.

"We are here to demonstrate that men and women are equal, and treating the women is helping us show them that," he said.

In traditional Afghan culture, the women aren't allowed to be treated by a male doctor, said Ferris. When conducting the CMAs, female doctors and interpreters must accompany the medical teams in support of this cultural sensitivity.

Remaining aware of the cultural differences and still having a successful mission can sometimes be difficult, considering the fact that female medical personnel aren't always readily available, said Ferris.

"When selecting a site for the CMA we have to remember that the men and women must be seen separately," he said. "Sometimes it is difficult to find a location that gives you that scenario. Some places are very flat, while other places have small valleys. In some instances, you may be able to use a building or you may have to make the vehicles work as walls between rooms."

2nd Lt. Julie Sheets, CMA PA, gently presses the abdomen of a young girl while she evaluates her symptoms during the Ruye Sang village CMA.

Even if the women's clinic is separate from the men's, the women still won't come if they feel uncomfortable, said Horsch.

"Our number one concern when setting up the clinics during the CMAs is that the women are comfortable with the location of the clinic," she said. "If they aren't comfortable with the clinic, they won't come for medical care."

Since there had never been a mission of this kind in the Bamian province, with everything in place to strictly meet the cultural situation, the medical team didn't know what the response would be, said Ferris.

"The (number) of women who showed up at the women's clinic in Bamian was an absolute miracle," said Ferris. "Normally the women trickle in as the day goes on, but here, the women flocked to the clinic. The response says a lot for the work we are doing (in Afghanistan)."

In all, nearly 200 women showed up for treatment, which the staff said was a significant number compared to previous CMAs.

Working with the villages of Afghanistan has improved the relationship between many of the villages and the Coalition forces, said Ferris.

"One reason for the improvement is the way the Coalition has treated the people," he said.

Sitting under a tree holding the hand of an elderly woman or a sick child may not mean much to some, but for the women of Afghanistan it means the world, said Horsch.

When she first arrived in Afghanistan, Horsch said that she had to draw a distinction between the patients she was seeing here and the patients she was used to seeing in the United States because of the cultural differences.

"By going out and seeing the people, I am learning that you have to feel out how the patient will best respond to you. Some of these women seem frightened by closeness and you have to find what helps them open up and trust you," she said. "For some it may take a gentle touch of the hand, while others may respond better to a soft caring voice. Some of the women are very distant and you must approach them."

Staying aware of the differences is vital in being able to provide proper medical care to the people without imposing on the values and culture of the people being treated, said Horsch.

Capt. Cristal Horsch, TF 168 PA, consults with Col. Steve Jones, TF Victory command surgeon, about the condition of a toddler during the CMA in Ruye Sang village June 14.

"We are here to help the people, not impose our ways on them," she said. "The thing to remember is to step back and try to walk in their shoes, so you can better understand where they are coming from and how to get the women to respond to the care and help you are trying to provide to them."

Visiting the villages and interacting with the people in a way that not only helps the mission but also improves the health of the people is an obligation the Coalition has for the people of Afghanistan, said Horsch.

"Living in the United States and other advanced countries in the world has been a blessing to all of us in the Coalition," she said. "We should take that blessing and pass the education we have been blessed with on to those who have lived a less fortunate life."

Efforts to promote stabilization in Afghanistan must be molded to their culture, said Horsch. The job of the Coalition is not to change the way the Afghans live, but to help them improve. Helping them with medical care and teaching them ways to stay healthy are both steps in the right direction.

Safety in flight starts with ground preparation

Safeguarding the Coalition

Story and photo by
Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — Operating a rotory wing aircraft is a delicate task in the most optimal conditions. Wind speed, navigation, fuel supply and terrain are just some of the factors military pilots and their crews have to deal with while in flight. Adding factors like high altitude, rough landing zones, brownout conditions and enemy fire only add to the challenges of operating in Afghanistan.

With all the challenges aviators must face, passenger safety becomes the job of everyone on the aircraft.

Sgt. 1st Class Mark W. Bradley, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment, a UH-60 Blackhawk crew chief for over 19 years said safety on any aircraft begins with preparation and many times comes down to common sense.

He said a majority of the things a person can do to stay safe can be done before entering the aircraft.

Aside from having the standard items like identification card and tags, "always have earplugs," he said.

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Turner, Co. C, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., aviation safety officer, also suggests prepping equipment.

"Secure all loose flaps and make sure pockets are closed," he said. "When the aircraft doors are open, things tend to flap around, and if an item isn't secure it will fly around."

Turner also said all weapons should be cleared and always pointed down when entering the aircraft and during flight.

"All the important equipment on an aircraft is over your head," he said.

Finally the last part of important preparation is hydration, Turner said.

"Any place in Afghanistan is a one to one and a half hour ride on aircraft," he said. "A helicopter can become very warm in some conditions and service members lose more water than they realize."

He said hydration would prevent most cases of motion sickness.

After individual preparation is complete, common sense should take over when in and around the aircraft, said Bradley.

"No matter how many times you have been on a helicopter, and no matter how many times you have heard a crew brief, always listen to the crew chief," he said. "We could be putting out information specific to the flight, or you could be picking up things you never heard before."

Although information can vary from brief to brief, the overwhelming theme revolves around crew chiefs.

"Complete cooperation," said Bradley. "Take all direction from the crew. If you want to do anything in the aircraft, communicate it through the crew."

Marine Sgt. Eric Lloyd, 769th HMHS crew chief, notifies his pilot when all their passengers are safely boarded before the CH-53 Sea Stallion can take off.

Taking direction from the crew chiefs starts with boarding the aircraft.

"Each aircraft varies but you will never go wrong when you look for directions from the crew chief," said Turner.

He said awareness is key when entering the aircraft. "The rotor blades of the Blackhawk can dip below six feet, while the rotor blades on the Chinook can dip just above four feet."

After passengers are on board, taking directions from the crew chief becomes especially important.

Turner suggests the key to staying safe in a helicopter is keeping all the straps and belts fastened. This includes provided seat belts, packing straps and chin straps on helmets.

"Anything loose in the back of an aircraft will become a projectile in heavy turbulence and hard landings," said Turner. "This includes people."

Another common mistake made by passengers while in flight he said is resting heads on weapons, which can cause an injury if the aircraft jumps in turbulence.

Finally safety becomes very important during the landing phase of flight – a time when the majority of aviation accidents occur, said Turner.

"When we are landing there are many factors we have to pay attention to," said Turner. "We always ask that passengers keep communication with us to a minimum."

Just like in flight, safety belts and harnesses are still, if not more, important during landing.

"A lot of service members get too excited and unbuckle before the aircraft is on the ground," said Turner. "There are too many things that can happen during landing to unbuckle before getting to the ground."

Turner said the same eagerness that causes service members to leave their seats early could also cause injury when exiting the aircraft.

"Just like everything else, wait for the signal from crew before exiting the aircraft," said Turner.

"We always recommend that service members take two steps and drop to the ground during a hot landing (a tactical landing when the aircraft remains running)," he said. "This process keeps service members close enough to the aircraft so they won't come in contact with the rotor system."

Turner also said to always be aware of obstacles just outside of the aircraft on the landing zones.

"Here in Afghanistan, the landing zones can be very unpredictable," he said. "You must be careful getting out."

"Just because the majority of the work in flying remains on the crew, doesn't mean that every person on an aircraft shouldn't always be aware of safety," he said. "Safety is everybody's job."

Whether it is boarding, riding or exiting any military aircraft the theme of safety will remain constant. Preparing and communicating with the crew members are the two best methods for staying safe during much of the traveling done in Afghanistan.

DVIDS provides real-time news back to U.S.

Story by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan — Hundreds of service members squeezed into the "Clamshell" here May 16 to participate in a history-making video teleconference with their commander-in-chief as he addressed the ongoing Global War on Terrorism.

As the troops watched his speech on a big screen television, a Soldier panned a video camera across the room, capturing the expressions on their faces.

Thanks to the Digital Video Information Distribution System, this image was sent in real-time via satellite to MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Fla., where President George W. Bush spoke to troops assigned to U.S. Central Command. The speech was also broadcast to news stations world-wide.

Behind the scenes, Sgt. Christopher Kozloski, a journalist with the 105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Oklahoma National Guard, kept his fingers crossed, hoping the new system was running. In the end, his fear was for naught, as the teleconference went off without a hitch.

"This was my first real-world mission with the system," said Kozloski.

DVIDS is fairly new to the Army. "There are systems in Iraq and Kuwait, and then we have the system here in Afghanistan," he said. "When my unit leaves, the DVIDS system will stay here for the next rotations to use."

Kozloski is one of the first Soldiers trained on the system, and one of only two in this theater who knows how to properly use it to its full potential.

"This system allows us to tell the Soldier story," said Kozloski. "It allows us to get footage back to the States in real time. Before, the timeliness just wasn't there."

In the past, military broadcast journalists and documentation specialists would package their stories on video cassettes, then mail them back to the United States, often taking as long as a month before families and service members could see the stories on programs like American Forces Network, the Pentagon Channel, and Soldiers Radio and Television. Now, using DVIDS, stories and footage are beamed up to a satellite, then pulled back down in Germany by a civilian company, Crawford Communications. The company then shoots the information back out to another satellite, where it is pulled down in Atlanta.

"Once the stories are received in Atlanta, a marketing team distributes our products out around the world," said Kozloski. "We can specifically designate where we want the stories to go."

For example, a story about a unit from the Ohio National Guard can be sent specifically to news stations in Ohio, letting family members see the product within days, even hours, of when the information was gathered.

For years, civilian media outlets have been using satellite trucks to broadcast live feeds to their viewers at home. Now, the military has this same capability. In Operation Enduring Freedom this is an invaluable asset to the battlefield, according to Kozloski.

"Time is key in this business – it's irreplaceable," he said. With that in mind, public affairs professionals throughout Afghanistan can continue to tell the Coalition story, reaching millions of people in the United States and around the world, and giving them a timely, first-hand account of Coalition efforts in Afghanistan.

Engineers

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great Coalition asset, he added.

"This site gives the Coalition commander the ability to stage operations and bring forces to an area that was basically inaccessible months ago," said Crall.

But all of this wouldn't be possible without the Soldiers, he said.

"It's been the sheer ingenuity of our Soldiers – and their absolute drive to succeed, and not let any obstacle they've encountered stop their mission – to credit for what we've done," said Crall.

What they've done will greatly impact the mission here and provide a much needed asset to the Coalition commander, allowing him to reach areas he wasn't previously able to, said Crall. And Crall's men have made it all possible through their tireless efforts in securing and constructing a landing strip and a base camp where there was absolutely nothing before.

"I am extremely proud of my guys," said Crall, "they have done such a great job and should have the credit for the success."

Pods: LITENING helps A-10 mission

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McGarry. "With binoculars, I can tell if it is a car or a truck. With LITENING, I can tell if the vehicle has been driven recently and how many people are standing next to it."

During a recent mission providing top cover to a group of Afghan and American Soldiers entering a village to talk with village elders about potential attackers, McGarry demonstrated just how useful the LITENING pod is. The ground commander was concerned that enemy forces might be watching his men and asked the captain to check out the village from the air. The A-10 pilot was able to survey the village from the air and give the ground forces a heads-up on potential threats and keep an eye on those targets.

This requires a great deal of coordination with ground forces through joint terminal attack controllers, or JTACs, said McGarry. These service members are specially trained to coordinate aircraft movement, as well as direct air strikes from the ground. "Although I can use the LITENING pod and determine there are people in buildings, I can't tell whether or not the people are friendly or hostile – the JTAC can relay information to me and let me know if I need to engage the targets or continue to watch the situation," he continued.

Learning how to use the advanced equipment took some adjustment, but the A-10 pilots had practice before they left their home station in Alaska. "We deployed here the last week in March," said McGarry, "but started flying with the LITENING pod in January. We had a full three months to train with the new equipment – more than any other deploying A-10 squadron."

With this extra training under their belts, the members of the A-10 squadron have brought added combat capabilities to the mission in Afghanistan.

"Flying with the LITENING pod truly adds another option to my ability to monitor the ground," said Taylor. "I have a lot more tools to watch for the bad guys and look out for the good guys."

MPs maintain security at KAF gates

Story and photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Fearing
105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Today's military policeman enjoys the distinction of a unique role by having two diverse and challenging missions. Just as infantrymen are trained to conduct combat operations on the front lines, MP's can conduct combat operations in the rear area. They also provide physical security, law enforcement and criminal investigation in garrison.

Members of the 209th Military Police Company are combining those roles to provide physical security in a combat environment. The Fort Polk, La. unit is responsible for securing entry points onto Kandahar Air Field in southern Afghanistan.

The Soldiers of the 209th arrived in Afghanistan ready to perform missions "outside the wire," referring to combat patrols off the Kandahar base, said Staff Sgt. Jason Friebe, 209th MP Co. squad leader. Friebe said he thought the company would be patrolling the Afghan countryside. Instead, his group is fulfilling another mission that is equally important – force protection in and around the airfield.

The importance of base security is not lost on those working at Kandahar. According to Base Operations Commander, Lt. Col. Wesley Anderson, force protection is "the first requirement for KAF-proper." Anderson said that without the 209th MP Company at the gates, "security on base would be severely degraded." He explained that their training and experience are skills that are not present if the duty is "detailed out," to just any available unit.

Spc. Eleanor Huerta, 209th MP Co., pushes the gate up to allow a vehicle through while on guard duty at Gate 3 on Kandahar Airfield.

Recognizing the importance of force protection, the Soldiers secure entry points like Gate 3. Here, Pfc. Ashley Cairo secures the primary entrance for local nationals who work or make deliveries on the base. With her M249 Squad Automatic Weapon at the ready, she remarked, "We're more than adequately trained for this (type of duty)."

Pfc. Eleanor Huerta, also an MP on entry point duty, said that although there were some differences between her expectations of duty in Afghanistan and what she ended up doing, she is dealing with it well. "They told us to be flexible and we're flexible," she quipped as she checked a truck trying to enter the compound. After inspecting the truck and the credentials of its passengers, she pushed the swing arm up and allowed the truck to pass through. It is a scene that she repeats numerous times a day, seven days a week.

Only a few feet away, at Gate 3's pedestrian entry point, Staff Sgt. Michael Creekmore assessed the work the MPs were doing as gate security. "We're doing a good job," he said as he smiled at his team. "Nothing gets through us," he added.

Pfc. Jonathan Hernandez, a member of Creekmore's team, explained that MPs are protecting the force at Kandahar Air Field. "We're checking locals, searching them to ensure no IED's (improvised explosive devices), electronic devices, communication devices or other contraband goes through." Hernandez said that occasionally someone tries to bring a cellular phone or other contraband onto the compound. Those who bring contraband items are turned away and their access is terminated. "We notify their supervisor. They know upfront what they can bring in," he added.

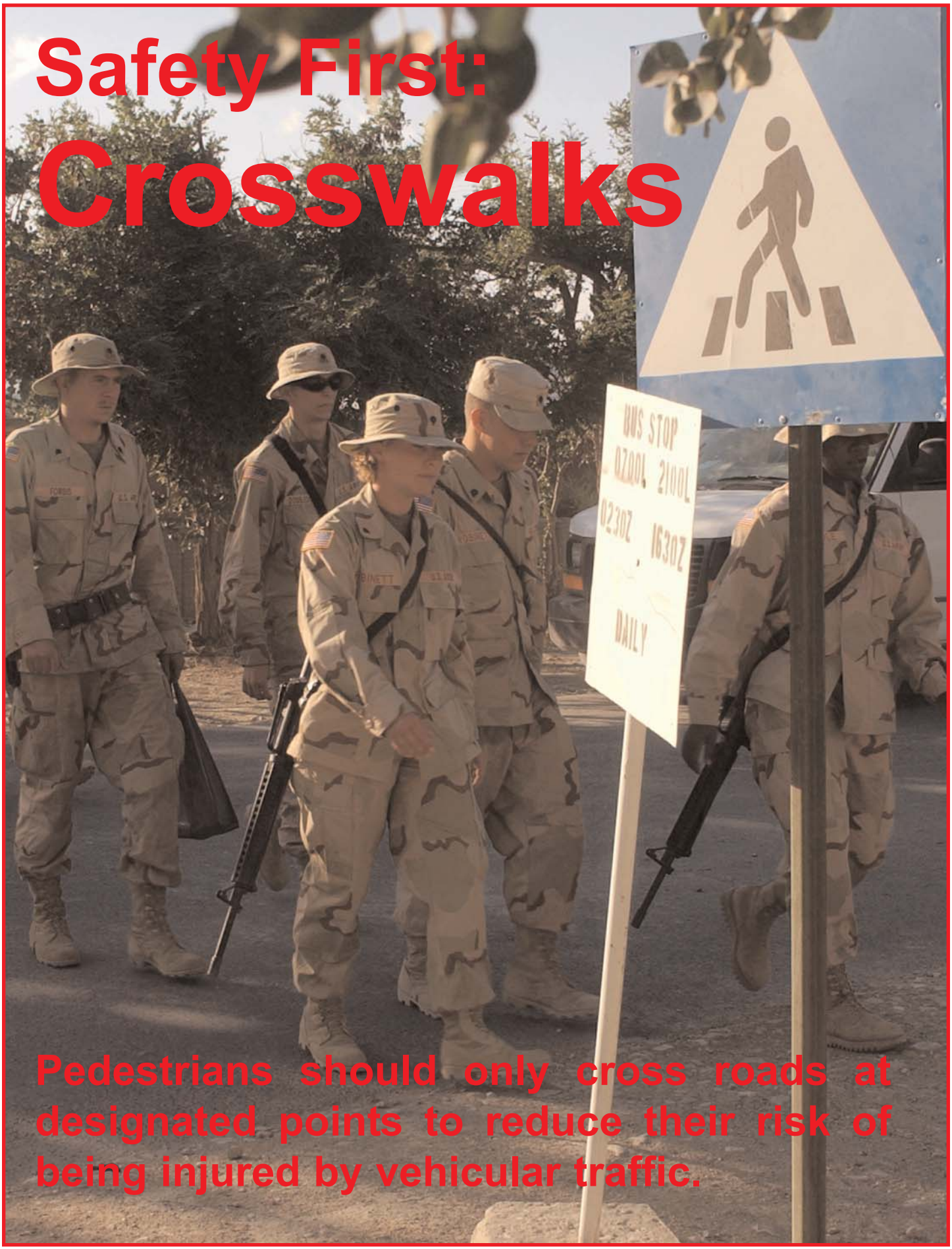
At Gate 3, the trucks continue to pull up. The MP's and other security personnel check loads and verify their clearances. Soldiers in the tower remain vigilant and Kandahar Airfield remains safe.

Pfc. Jonathan Hernandez, 209th MP Co., searches a local national at Kandahar Airfield's pedestrian gate. Hernandez and his company maintain security on Gate 3 by searching pedestrians and vehicles coming on to KAF.

The Military Police Creed states their mission is to "Assist commanders in performing their missions by safeguarding their commands." Anderson couldn't agree more, stating that "Manning entry points may not be the most glamorous job, but it is one of the most important ones."

Spc. Justin Fager, 209th MP Co., checks a vehicle and its driver before being allowed access to Kandahar Airfield.

Safety First: Crosswalks



Pedestrians should only cross roads at designated points to reduce their risk of being injured by vehicular traffic.